

Message Text

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FOR HOLBROOKE ONLY

FOLLOWING REPEAT MANILA 20431 ACTION SECSTATE DATED DEC 30:

QTE:C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 20431

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: SHUM, PINT, RP
SUBJ: MARCOS OFFERS TO MEET WITH CHURCH ACTIVISTS

REF: A MANILA 19055, B REUTER/NEWSOM/BRAIBANTI MEMCON OF DEC. 1

1. SUMMARY. FATHER JAMES REUTER, AN AMERICAN JESUITY, HAS INFORMED EMBOFF THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS IS ATTEMPTING TO ARRANGE A HEAD-TO HEAD DIALOGUE WITH HIS CHURCH ADVERSARIES FOR EARLY JANUARY. FATHER REUTER INTERPRETS THIS AS INDICATING THAT THE US MAY FINALLY BE GETTING THROUGH TO PRESIDENT MARCOS ON HUMAN RIGHTS. AS THE SAME TIME, HE IS CONCERNED THAT THE PROPOSED DIALOGUE MAY PARADOXICALLY PRESAGE A NEW GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON CHURCH ACTIVISTS. END SUMMARY

2. ON DECEMBER 28, EMBOFF CALLED ON FATHER JAMES REUTER AT LATTER'S URGENT REQUEST. REUTER IS A WELL KNOWN AMERICAN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 310579

JESUIT WHO HAS LIVED IN THE PHILIPPINES SINCE 1938 AND WHO ENJOYS THE RESPECT OF MARCOS LOYALISTS AND OPPONENTS ALIKE. HE RELATED THAT HE HAD BEEN CONTACTED RECENTLY BY BOTH PRESIDENT AND MRS. MARCOS. FATHER REUTER SAID A FEW DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS A BANKER NAMED MERING RAMOS,WHO HE DESCRIBED AS "A CARRIER PIGEON FOR THE MARCOSES," INFORMED HIM THAT MRS. MARCOS DESIRED TO SEE HIM AS SOON

AS POSSIBLE. FATHER REUTER AGREED ON THE CONDITION THAT THERE BE NO PUBLICITY AND THAT IT BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THAT HE WAS REPRESENTING ONLY HIMSELF AND NOT HIS FELLOW JESUITS.

3. REUTER SAID SHORTLY BEFORE CHRISTMAS HE WAS ESCORTED BY RAMOS TO MALACANANG WHERE HE HAD A FOUR-HOUR MEETING WITH MRS. MARCOS. HE SAID MRS. MARCOS DID ALMOST ALL THE TALKING. SHE OUTLINED HER GRANDiose PLANS FOR METRO MANILA, REPEATING SEVERAL TIMES THAT A SMALL MINORITY (REUTER INTERPRETED THIS TO MEAN SQUATTERS) WOULD HAVE TO MAKE SACRIFICES FOR THE GOOD OF THE MAJORITY. SHE TOLD FATHER REUTER THAT THE US AMBASSADOR HAD SPOKEN WITH HER HUSBAND SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS, PARTICULARLY THE AQUINO CASE. SHE MENTIONED THAT AQUINO HAS BEEN OFFERED A POSITION AT HARVARD AND SAID THAT AS FAR AS SHE IS CONCERNED AQUINO IS FREE TO ACCEPT THE OFFER. FATHER REUTER SAID MRS. MARCOS TOLD, "WE WANTED AQUINO TO ESCAPE ALONG WITH LOPEZ AND OSMENA, BUT HE INSISTED ON REMAINING BEHIND TO BE A MARTYR." FATHER REUTER SAID MRS. MARCOS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE IMF HAD RECENTLY TURNED DOWN A PROJECT FOR THE PHILIPPINES DUE TO HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS. (THIS PROBABLY WAS AN ERRONEOUS REFERENCE TO THE US ABSTENTION ON ADB LOAN.) SHE BLAMED THIS ON CHURCH ACTIVISTS WHO DISSEMINATE EXAGGERATED REPORTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE PHILIPPINES.

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PAGE 03 STATE 310579

4. THE DAY BEFORE HIS MEETING WITH MRS. MARCOS, FATHER REUTER CONTINUED, LABOR SECRETARY BLAS OPLE INVITED HIM FOR A PRIVATE CHAT AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL COFFEE SHOP. DURING THEIR MEETING, OPLE WANTED TO KNOW IF FATHER REUTER THOUGHT CHURCH-STATE DIFFERENCES ARE IRRECONCILABLE. FATHER REUTER EQUIVOCATED. OPLE ALSO SAID PRESIDENT MARCOS WANTED A LIST OF HIS LEADING CHURCH OPPONENTS AND READING MATERIAL EXPLAINING THEIR VIEWS. REUTER COMPLIED WITH BOTH THESE REQUESTS.

5. THEN, ON CHRISTMAS EVE, FATHER REUTER WAS INVITED TO MALACANANG PALACE. HE SAID PRESIDENT MARCOS GREETED HIM LIKE AN OLD FRIEND (REUTER HAS KNOWN MARCOS FOR MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS BUT HAS STAYED AWAY FROM MALACANANG SINCE MARTIAL LAW). MARCOS PROPOSED TO FATHER REUTER THAT HE (MARCOS) SIT DOWN WITH THE LEADING CHURCH ACTIVISTS TO DISCUSS THEIR DIFFERENCES. MARCOS SUGGESTED JANUARY 5 FOR THE MEETING.

6. FATHER REUTER SAID HE INTERPRETED THESE DEVELOPMENTS AS INDICATIONS THAT THE AMBASSADOR "IS REALLY GETTING THROUGH

TO MARCOSES" ON HUMAN RIGHTS. HE ATTRIBUTED PRESIDENT MARCOS' NEW-FOUND INTEREST IN CEMENTING RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH TO A HEIGHTENED REALIZATION THAT US CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE PHILIPPINES IS REAL AND COULD CAUSE HIM SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THE US CONGRESS. HOWEVER, FATHER REUTER WAS NOT SANGUINE ABOUT THE PROPOSED DIALOGUE. HE SAID MANY PROMINENT CHURCH LEADERS, INCLUDING BISHOP CLAVER, ARE INCLINED NOT TO ATTEND. FATHER REUTER FEARS THAT THIS WOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT CHURCH-STATE DIFFERENCES ARE INDEED IRRECONCILABLE AND MIGHT LEAD TO A NEW WAVE OF REPRESSION DIRECTED AT CHURCH ACTIVISTS. HE SAID THE MERE OFFER OF A DIALOGUE WITH RADICAL CLERGY MAY AUGER A NEW ANTI-CHURCH CAMPAIGN. HE SAID IT IS A TYPICAL MARCOS TACTIC TO PRECEDE BLOWS
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 STATE 310579

AGAINST HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS WITH CONCILIATORY GESTURES. IN THIS WAY, HE EXPLAINED, MARCOS CAN LATER ARGUE THAT HE WENT AS FAR AS HE COULD TOWARD REACHING A SETTLEMENT BUT SINCE HIS OPPONENTS WERE ADAMANT HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO STRIKE THEM DOWN.

7. COMMENT: WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE MARCOSES' CONCILIATORY GESTURES TOWARD FATHER REUTER, WHO STILL FACES THE POSSIBILITY OF MILITARY TRIAL ON SUBVERSION CHARGES FOR HIS ROLE IN PUBLISHING THE COMMUNICATOR. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT DURING HIS DECEMBER 2 MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR, PRESIDENT MARCOS PROMISED TO MEET PERSONALLY WITH FATHER REUTER. (FATHER REUTER SAID MARCOS MADE NO DEFINITE COMMITMENT REGARDING HIS SUBVERSION CASE.) WE ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED BY THESE INDICATIONS THAT HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS SEEM TO HAVE MOVED TO THE FOREFRONT OF PRESIDENT MARCOS' POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT.
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